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# *Introduction*

When one makes the statement that at least half the world's population is made up of women, nobody would dream of disputing it. But the consequences of this fact and the significance of such a statement have not been properly appreciated even by those who are committed to the cause of people's liberation in general. It has not dawned on them that the liberation of people from economic, political and socio-cultural domination must involve the transformation of the status and image of women as well.

It was this aspect of the liberation struggle that was the focal point of discussion at a consultation of Asian women which the Christian Conference of Asia convened in Hong Kong in August 1978. Its specific task was "to look at the issues which fall under the category of the struggle for human dignity in Asia with special attention on women."

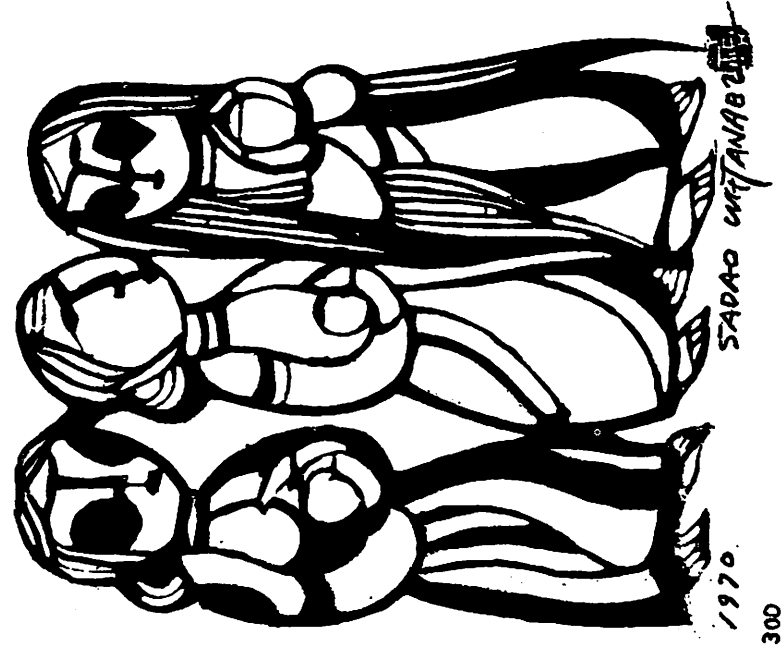
It was a small consultation. There were only nine participants. But they came from nine different countries and situations. Their cultural backgrounds, political viewpoints and denominational affiliations were different.

The variety of experiences that these women brought with them triggered off discussions on a variety of issues.

The papers presented in this booklet do not cover all the topics discussed. Nor do they cover all aspects of the topics they deal with.

Our hope is that they will promote further discussion at local and national levels and lead to concrete action in specific situations.

*Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB*



# The Role of the Church in the Oppression of Women

by Chitra Fernando

*"Behold I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth,  
do you now perceive it?"*

*Isaiah 43:18f*

*"As for the times of ignorance, God has overlooked them"*

*Acts 17:30*

In examining the Church's role in the oppression of women, we are not so much concerned with those times of ignorance as with this time of enlightenment.

The Church is slowly coming to the realisation that the sexism that was deeply ingrained in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is now untenable. In direct contrast to the declaration of Pope Gregory that women were "the gateway to hell" is the declaration of Pope Paul VI that "men and women are equal before God, equal as persons, equal as children of God, equal in dignity, equal also in their rights." Christian laymen now often express their surprise that there should be discrimination against women in the Church in this day and generation. An Editorial in *The Ecumenical Review* (Volume XXVII No. 4 — October 1975) states, "So much has been written by Christian women and also men on the subject that one wonders whether all that has been necessary to convince the Christian man that he has been treating his constant companion as some-one inferior to himself."

**'Thus far and no further'**

The Church seems ready to concede that women should participate more fully in the life and mission of the Church, but instead of enabling them to reach out towards "the glorious liberty of the children of God" the Church seems to be saying "thus far and no further". It has been said

that the Church baptizes women not to ordination but to subordination. Women, who are "members of Christ", have their roles defined for them not according to their gifts but merely on account of their femininity.

Thus Pope Paul VI, addressing Mrs. Helvi Sipilä, Secretary General of the United Nations International Women's Year Meeting in 1975, said that the programme of I.W.Y. was "not extraneous to the most lively interests of the Church itself." He continued, however, that "this does not exclude the distinction in unity, and the specific contribution of women to the full development of society according to her proper and personal vocation"; and "since the family remains the fundamental and life-giving cell of human society according to the very plan of God, women will preserve and develop principally in the family community."

Commenting on this statement, Sister Teresa A Mount says, "From the position that woman's particular role is related to life within the family, Pope Paul seems to move to the position that other roles and, in a particular way, the role of priest are closed to her." So a Vatican Commission set up in May 1973 for the study of women's role in Society and in the Church was asked to include all areas of concern for the place of women, their rights and responsibilities, with one notable exception. The question of the ordination of women was not to be discussed. So much for Papal concessions to women.

Taking the cue from the Roman Catholic Church, the other churches have been wary in their acceptance of women as co-heirs of the Kingdom of God. Most Protestant churches have accepted the need for a positive attitude to women's ministry in the Church. In most of these churches women are allowed to teach in Sunday Schools. In some churches they participate more actively in church services — reading the Bible and even preaching. Other churches, like the Methodist Church, allow women to become deaconesses, but only on condition that they do not marry. At a recent meeting of a Committee on Women's Ministry in the Church in Sri Lanka it was suggested that women over 45 should be appointed as deaconesses. It is interesting to note that in 451, the Council of Chalcedon recommended that the office of deaconesses, the only one open to women, should be limited to unmarried women over fifty years of age. The passage of fifteen centuries seems to have made hardly any difference!

✕ The ordination of women as full-time ministers has been accepted by several churches in Asia. These women, however, are seldom if ever given full authority to minister to the needs of a parish congregation. Women ministers are usually expected to serve only in team ministries and are more often than not paid less than men-priests. We wonder whether women will ever be accepted as complete equals or whether

there will always be a line drawn limiting their ministry to particular areas of the Church's life and Mission.

### The Church does not challenge; it only reacts

A The attitude of Jesus towards women constituted a challenge to the society of his day. Every incident recorded in the Bible in which our Lord encountered women illustrates his concern for them and his attempt to take them beyond the confines of Jewish male-dominated patriarchal society. He broke the rules — deliberately — as when he discussed theology with a Samaritan woman. He commended Mary — much to the annoyance of her conventional sister — for releasing herself from household chores to listen to his preaching on the Kingdom of God. He allowed women to be the first witnesses of the resurrection, even though under Jewish law women could not testify in a court. His objections to divorce were not quite what the church makes them out to be. In Jewish society only a man could initiate divorce, and it was referred to as “putting his wife away” as if she were an animal with some incurable disease.

The Church's present attitude to women is at best a half-hearted recognition of the need to make concessions as a reaction to the change in secular society. Jean Skuse says, “Like many others I was brought up to believe in the myth that one of the great justifications of Christianity was that it had raised the status of women. At the same time my life experiences were telling me something quite different. I know the Church denied me certain rights and opportunities because I was female. . . I travelled and experienced the joy of being treated as a person whose contribution was important. I saw how women were able to participate in Christian societies that are not Christian and in secular organisations. So it is with great sadness that I see some churches in Australia still giving scriptural and theological reasons for keeping women in their place whilst others, for fear of offending their main supporters, or reacting to social changes in the role of women, are doing nothing beyond offering women one or two token places on a few committees.”

The fear of offending seems to govern the Church both at the local level and at a wider level. The recent Lambeth Conference with characteristic Anglican diplomacy passed a motion accepting both member churches who ordain women and those who do not. This stand of the Anglican Church is very interesting. The world-wide Anglican community has communions which ordain women — as in Canada, Australia and Hongkong. This world-wide Anglican communion could not have preserved its unity if the Lambeth Fathers had refused to accept the ordination of women. Hence the equivocal nature of the motion. What the Lambeth Fathers did not do was to actively support the ordination of women — although the Archbishop

of Canterbury himself has admitted that he favours ordination in principle. What prevented them from doing so?

It is no secret that the Anglican Church is dominated by the fear that to ordain women would widen the rift between Anglicans and Roman Catholics who, apart from a few radicals, favour a male priesthood. Canon Mary Simpson of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, who recently spent five weeks in Britain, is convinced that such fear is uncalled-for. She says, "This means accepting that nothing must ever change in the Anglican Church. May be the Roman Catholics will come to follow us as they have done in other things. It was we, not they, who first put the services into English. . . the Church is going to die if it does not de-fossilize-itself. ✓ It needs to be able to speak to today's world in a way that today's world can hear. It can't do that with women as second-class citizens."

Far from confronting society with a challenging theology of what it means to be human, the Church has not yet even made a positive response to the changes in society that have affected the role of women. It has merely reacted with a few token gestures such as mere administrative adjustments in women's representation on Church bodies. The Church has been farthest from the gospel in its attitude to women. In recent years the Church has made great sacrifices to combat poverty and other inequalities but within its own membership it has been blind to the discrimination against women.

### And Women acquiesce

While the Church thus refuses to recognize women as members of Christ, women themselves have been brainwashed into believing in their own inferiority and even impurity. The attitude of the Church, far from helping forward the liberation of women, has helped to reinforce the social taboos that operate against women. Men and women as children and adults listen to Bible readings such as Gen. 3:16, Exodus 20:17, Exodus 22:16-17, Proverbs 31:3, 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and Ephesians 5:22-24 — without the benefit of scholarly exegesis and interpretation. This deeply influences their role interpretations and value formations.

There is very little scope for the theological education of women in many countries. In the Asian context this is particularly distressing. ✕ For one thing Christian women in this part of the world take the Bible more seriously and uncritically. For many of them it is their only reading material and, thanks to the efforts of the Bible Society, they are able to get copies of it almost free of charge.

✕ Having accepted their inferior role, they bring into the Church the taboos against women operative in their own indigenous cultures.

So in many churches in India and Sri Lanka women sit on one side of the church and men on the other — and an andro-centric church secretly approves. The veils worn by Roman Catholic women, Bridal and Confirmation veils, all perpetuate what may be called the heresy of difference. The subservience written into the marriage service clearly indicates to men and women who should adopt the roles of dominance and who of subordination.

The biological otherness of women is used to imply that she is unclean. Mystery still surrounds the “Churching of Women” after child-birth. Instead of being a thanksgiving service in which both parents participate, it is generally regarded as a purification rite for the mother — as the prayer “that she may be cleansed from all uncleanness” clearly indicates. No wonder that women develop a revulsion for their own bodies.

I personally know many Christian women who do not participate in the service of Holy Communion when they are menstruating. I know a woman who took her daughter to task for preaching at a church service. She said, “Don’t you know we are unclean?”

Yet the women who constantly ministered to Jesus, who touched him to ask for healing, who showed him marks of affection, who loved him, listened to him and announced his resurrection seem not to have been bothered by such feelings of physical impurity. God in Christ has not decreed that half the human race should be unclean, but his Church is obviously content to allow, even to encourage, its members to believe that somehow he has, simply because it is in the interests of an andro-centric Church to do so.

### ‘The First Century Game’

Whenever the Church is cornered into an admission of its guilt it reverts to what I call “the first century game”. The Church seems to be saying that the rules that govern its attitude to women are those laid down in certain New Testament teachings. Many Christians still try to live as though the first century is our ultimate and unalterable point of reference, but can it be seriously argued that we can go back twenty centuries and live as though the social norms of the first century were determinative for us?

To endeavour to go back to the Bible and to play first century is to make nonsense of two thousand years of human history — God’s history. The world has moved on under the hand of God and we must thankfully acknowledge this fact. While we reap the fruits of progress and new thought in every sphere, including the scientific and sociological spheres, we cannot continue to have a static church which pretends that time has stood still.



Besides, we all know that the Church is not even playing the first century game consistently and honestly. For example it has discarded the teachings regarding the obedience due to masters from slaves and the practice of the communal ownership of property.

There was a time, not long ago, when Christians who supported the liberation of women countered the Pauline injunctions regarding the subservience of women with other texts from the Bible which pointed in another direction, such as Galatians 3:26-38. There is no male nor female in Christ, any more than there can be differences between races or classes. The boundary walls raised by the law are now abolished for ever.

The churches have endeavoured to interpret this passage in a spiritual sense, and to deprive it of its social significance, but the plain meaning of St. Paul is clear and the social and practical implications are inescapable. In Christ we have a new community and within that new community there is no place for distinctions or discrimination whether man-made or supposedly God-made.

Imagine a church in which "the status of women in the Church is one of sharing equally with men in all aspects of the Church's activities with everyone giving leadership and discharging responsibilities upon the basis of their capabilities, without regard to their sex and with no function regarded as especially suited to one sex or the other." That indeed would be a truly Christian church.

But it is futile for us to sling Biblical proof texts at one another. The question at issue is, how do we understand Biblical texts? Do we try to maintain that they are normative for all times, and that the Church continues to be rooted and grounded in the first century, or do we try to understand them in accordance with the principles of hermeneutics. In our Biblical interpretation we should be able to distinguish between the compelling demands of the Gospel and the temporary regional regulations which the Apostles considered to be necessary in their particular social context. The new humanity that came into being through Jesus is still being experienced by the Church. The message of the Gospel for today has to be interpreted by the Church of today and it is up to the Church to work out the Gospel message in relation to women.

The task of rousing Christian men and women to resist all forms of cultural stereotyping that begins in early childhood is not an easy task but it needs to be done.

Unless and until traditional Biblical interpretations, theological convictions and doctrines in the Church are transformed by the

liberating dynamic expressed in Jesus Christ, the Church will not be able to recognize the work of God's Holy Spirit in and through its women. The Church as an establishment allowing and even reinforcing male dominance cannot see the revolutionary liberating power of God working in women. Only women who experience this power can lead the Church to this new vision.

### **The eschatological Vision**

The Church's vision is the vision of the Kingdom of God. Christ envisaged a new society which would be a foretaste of "a new heaven and a new earth" to be realised at the end of history.

During his life on earth Jesus set about working for its realization. Yet the attitude of Christ to women was such an unusual one that perhaps the early Church could not believe that he intended that it should influence Christian thought and action. (Even so did Peter find it difficult to believe that Christ really wanted them to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles). It may well be that women were thus suppressed in the early Church through ignorance, but it certainly is difficult to believe that women suppressed in the first century are to be suppressed in the Kingdom of God.

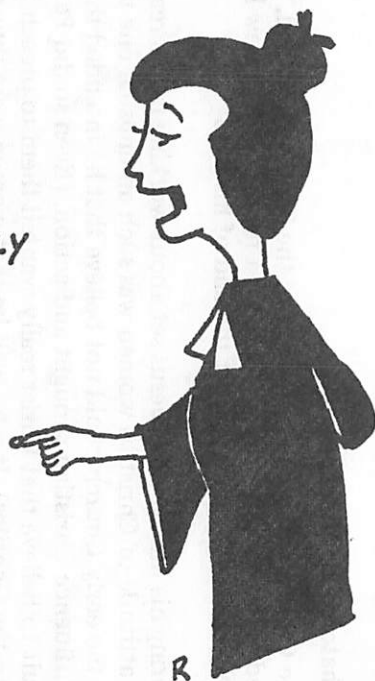
As we know, all theology is ultimately Kingdom theology. So when we discuss the place of women in Church or society it is the place of women in the Kingdom that we should take as our term of reference. If it is the task of the Church to prepare for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth, it must define in no uncertain terms the position of women in it. Since the eschatological vision cannot but include the full and equal participation of all humanity, the full and equal involvement of men and women in building that new society is not merely necessary but vital. The Church ignores its responsibility — to enable women freely to make their contribution to the unfolding of that new society and to the deepening of its ideology at its own peril.

A church which refuses terms of complete equality to one-half of the human race should not be surprised to find that it has become increasingly irrelevant in the world of today.

A WOMAN THEOLOGIAN  
IS STILL REGARDED AS EITHER  
HERETICAL OR HYSTERICAL!

IF THE FIRST - SHE IS FIGURATIVELY  
BURNT AT THE STAKE. IF  
THE SECOND, PEOPLE HASTEN  
TO FIND HER A HUSBAND!

*Marianne Katoppo*



# Woman's Image of Herself

*by Marianne Katoppo*

## Introduction

It has been established that, on the whole, Asian woman's self-image is unsatisfactory. ~~This can be attributed to education as well as cultural factors.~~ From an early age she has been conditioned to a subservient, subordinate role. Her status will always be derived, never primary. Instead of being a person in her own right, she will always be "daughter/wife/mother" *of a man*.

In the case of Christian women, their poor self-image is also the result of the tendency of the churches to give male chauvinism a theological and quasi-divine legitimation.

There are Churches where women have no awareness of being created in the image of God. They have always been taught that woman was created only to be "a helper" for man. These Churches have conveniently overlooked the implications of the Hebrew *'ezer* (translated "helper") which is otherwise only used for God, the Help of the helpless.

The importance of raising woman's awareness of her self-worth cannot be over-emphasized. Always accepting that God transcends all human understanding, we could make use here of the significance of the feminine aspects of Divinity, and also of the meaning of the symbol of Mary, in order to restore woman's true image of herself.

## Theological motifs

a) The dominance of male hyperboles (e.g. YHWH almost always being read as Adonai), and of male symbols, have seriously impaired revelation. The accumulated bias of centuries has conditioned most of us not to take Genesis 1:27 really seriously. On a deeper level, it is not really accepted that woman too is created in God's image, and that it is just as valid to ascribe feminine qualities to God as it is to ascribe masculine qualities.

In the Old Testament, the word *rechamim* is used for God's *mercy, compassion*. Literally, it means "movements of the womb" (*rechem*). Yet some male theologians will perform the most extraordinary contortions exegetically in order to avoid relating this to the *motherliness of God*.

Isaiah 49:15 is another example of the motherliness of God. So is Hosea 11.<sup>1</sup>

b) When God is called "Father", this is not to be taken in an ontic sense, because obviously God is neither male nor female. "Father" is intended to express the loving concern of God, who takes care of us. The category "father" is a symbol of divine fecundity and creativity.

c) In the cosmic religions of Asia, the Mother is very important. At its worst, one could say that there never was a sharp separation of the female from the male. In Indonesia, for example, the Rice Mother was — and still is — venerated throughout the archipelago.<sup>2</sup>

In the meta-cosmic soteriologies of Asia, such as Hinduism, it is unthinkable to dichotomise male and female to the extent it has been done in the Christian West. The *shakti*, i.e. the feminine aspect of the Deity (e.g. Brahma: Sarasvati; Vishnu: Lakshmi; Siva: Parvati) is by no means subordinate or inferior to the Deity: she *is* the Deity.

Forcing people to relate to an all-male Trinity is oppression. In the context of Asian cosmic religion and meta-cosmic soteriologies, it is also ridiculous.

d) In the tradition of the ecclesiastical West, the Holy Spirit is *He*. This is due to the fact that the feminine *Ruach* of the Hebrew was first effectively neutered by the Greek, then made masculine by the Latin. And it goes without saying that Aristotelian thinking also exerted a great deal of undue influence.

Is it coincidence that the symbol for the Holy Spirit is the *dove* (Greek: *Peristera*: "bird of Istar")? It would be interesting to speculate whether the battle between YHWH and Istar is still going on.<sup>3</sup>

In view of the quality and the function of the Spirit as God who *creates*, who *comforts*, "the Giver of Life" (Nicene Creed), it is not surprising that the Gnostic writings (such as the Gospel of the Hebrews,

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1. cf. D. Preman Niles, in *The Human and the Holy*.

2. cf. Philip van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ*.

3. cf. Gerrard Voss, "Maria in der Feier des Kirchenjahres", *Una Sancta* 4/1977, pp. 308,309.

the Acts of Thomas) called the Holy Spirit explicitly "*Mother* of Jesus, *Mother* of all creatures."

In one Pakistani language, the word for "Spirit" is feminine. However, on account of the Nicene creed and English liturgical texts calling the Spirit "*Lord*", the language had to be *changed*: the natural idiom ceased to exist, and in its place the people got "religioness".

e) For a more relevant woman's theology, perhaps it would also be useful to reflect a little more on the significance of *other* feminine aspects of Divinity. Besides *Ruach*, we know of *Hokmah* (Wisdom) and *Shekinah* (Presence). Here we will confine ourselves to *Hokmah*, which had the good fortune to remain feminine in the "sacred" languages. (Greek: *Sophia*; Latin: *sapientia*).

Post-exilic literature shows how *Hokmah* (as eventually *Shekinah*) was almost personified: "a female form of great refinement and beauty, whose utterances were most profound and radiant".<sup>4</sup>

She inspired *love*. She *was* love. In the Proverbs, the Book of Wisdom, Jesus Sirach — whenever *Hokmah* was the subject, even the most desicated hagiographer would wax lyrical in her praise.

In the light of the New Covenant, rather than personifying Wisdom, should we not see *Hokmah* as God's personal inclination to the world? As a form in which God is with us, and wants to be sought by us?<sup>5</sup>

Observe also that in the early Church there seems to have been an identification of *Hokmah* with *Jesus*.

**Mary, the fully liberated human being**

Protestantism, especially the Calvinist variety, has at best not displayed any great interest in Mary. Except for children's pageants at Christmas and Easter, Mary is invisible in the Protestant Church.

Many feminists, including feminist theologians, have rejected the model of Mary. This is understandable when we look at the standard portrayal of Mary. Statues or paintings usually depict her as sugar-sweet, fragile, with eyes either modestly downcast or turned up to heaven — not quite *here-and-now*! All this is in line with her supposed submissiveness. After all, did she not say: "I am the Lord's servant; may it happen to me as you have said"?

We fail to recognize that Mary's submission to the Will of God is

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4. Eulogia Wurz, "*Das Mutterliche in Gott*", *Una Sancta* 4/1977.

5. Eulogia Wurz, *op. cit.*

in no way the *subject submission of a slave* who has no choice. On the contrary, it is the *creative submission* of the fully liberated human being, who — not being subject to any other human being — is *free to serve God*.<sup>6</sup>

This, too, is the deepest meaning of *virginity*. It is a *positive stance* rather than a *negative dis-stance*.<sup>7</sup> (In German it is actually “Haltung” = “attitude”, and “Ent-haltung” = abstinence).

The image seeks to convey that God takes the initiative, and the human being is receptive.

Gregory of Nyssa already saw a metaphor for an *inner attitude* in *virgin*.

In woman's theology, *virgin* can be the symbol for the autonomy of woman. *Virgin*, then, would not primarily mean a woman who abstains from sexual intercourse, but a woman who does not lead a *derived* life (as “daughter/wife/mother” of a man), a woman who matures to wholeness within herself as complete person, who is subject of herself, and who is open for others. Through this maturing process, she is *fertile*, she *gives life* for God.

Not only *Virgin*, but also *Mother*, attains a new power of imagery which may liberate woman from the previous concept of *Virgin-Mother* (a biological impossibility!), which was being held up to them as a model. In its own way, this previous concept of *Virgin-Mother* was just as unacceptable as the other model, i.e., *Eve the temptress*.

It is no coincidence that of late more importance is being given to Mary, in Catholic dogma and even in Protestant thinking. Her *Magnificat* has become a sign of hope for many, not least in the theology of liberation. It is interesting, however, to note that Gutierrez does not even mention Mary.

The Thanksgiving and the Joy in the *Magnificat* is given to God, *who liberates through the oppressed* themselves. No image of a weeping and wailing Church, which can do nothing but pray, until God intervenes like a neat little *deus ex machina*!

Human liberation often seems to be a grim and joyless struggle. The *Magnificat* shows otherwise.

In the Indonesian context, it is interesting to note that Catholics

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6. Catharina Halkes: “Eine andere Maria”, Una Sancta 4/1977.

7. Catharina Halkes, op. cit.

call Mary *Bunda Maria* (Mother Mary). Mary's excellence is indeed made to derive from her *motherhood*; it is not defined primarily in terms of her physical *virginity*.<sup>8</sup>

### The motherliness of God/Jesus

We have already mentioned some images relating to the motherliness of God in the Old Testament.

I would like to cite some examples from outside the Old Testament. The Church Fathers are generally very misogynic in their outlook, for reasons which need not concern us here.

Yet Clement of Alexandria sings:

God is Love  
God can only be perceived in love;  
Father in his inexpressible being  
Mother in his compassionate pity for us.  
In His love for us  
The Father became woman  
The great sign for us is this:  
He who was born.

Anselm of Canterbury (1093):

And Thou, Jesus, sweet Lord, art Thou not also a mother?  
Truly, Thou art a mother, the mother of all mothers,  
Who tasted death, in Thy desire to give life to Thy children.

Maria de Groot comments that the words of Anselm are "(those) of a theologian on the way of prayer, who discovers the secret of birth and death which is as male as it is female, in the person of Jesus, the giver of life. Anselm experiences being mother and woman as a reality which gives life and reconciles."

In Indian devotional literature of the *bhakti* school, God is often spoken of as "Mother", for it is felt that the love of a mother for her child is one of the highest and most unselfish forms of human love. "Hindus therefore find it strange that the Christian tradition does not speak of God in this way, and sometimes draw attention to the fact that the Roman Catholic cult of the Virgin Mary is perhaps an attempt to compensate, giving scope to that side of human nature which longs for the comfort which a mother can give."<sup>9</sup>

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8. cf. Aloysius Pieris, S.J., "From Lilies to Roses", *Outlook*, Colombo, Vol. VIII no. 6, December 1970).

9. Robin Boyd, Kristadvaita, *A Theology for India*, The Christian Literature Society, Madras, India, 1977. Note that the author in the same breath goes on to say: "It is doubtful, however, if it (=God as Mother) is a figure which can be of much help in systematic theology."



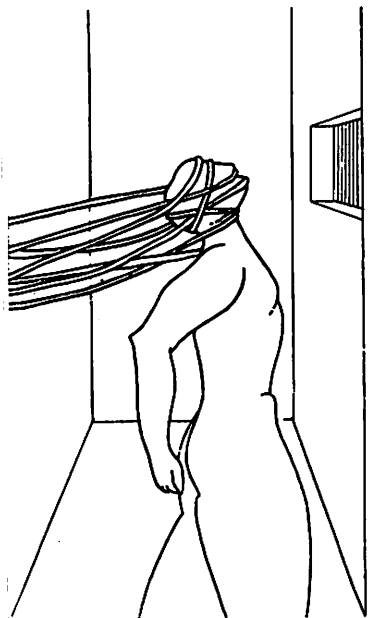
The Indian poet Narayan Vaman Tilak wrote of Christ:  
"Tenderest Mother-Guru mine,  
Saviour, where is love like thine?" 10

Mother is often the first teacher. Mother is a figure which must not be under-estimated in an Asian context. There are some tribes in Indonesia that call the bride-giving clan (=the mother's family) *the visible God*. There is the old saying that "Paradise is under the sole of mother's feet."

In developing an Asian theology, we must not overlook this. We must liberate ourselves first and foremost from the Aristotelian concept of *man* (i.e. the free Greek *male*), which has so seriously affected our concept of *God*.

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10. as quoted by Robin Boyd, *op. cit.*



# Women's Oppression and Class

*by Gabriele Dietrich*

## Feminism and Class

While the oppression of women is a general phenomenon throughout the history of humanity, it also expresses itself in class-specific terms. In India, one would have to add, there are also caste-specific forms of women's oppression. The liberal women's movement in the United States and Europe has not been alert to such differences since it more or less ignored the existence of classes. That is the reason why it largely remained confined to middle class women.

The socialist women's movements since the end of the 19th century were aware of the class aspect and focussed their interest much more on the situation of working class women. But the tendency was to adopt a position which can be characterised as class-reductionist. The oppression of women was supposed to be resolved in the general revolution, and therefore to raise "feminist" issues was felt to be bourgeois and "dividing the ranks of the working class". While there were some colourful feminists like Alexandra Kollontai participating in the Russian Revolution and even achieving positions of high responsibility, these must be seen as exceptions, and their influence was quenched soon after the revolution. This resulted in a rather incomplete liberation of women in the USSR because relative economic freedom, access to education, etc., were neither matched by full political representation nor by sufficient attitudinal changes among men as well as women. Similar situations prevail in countries like China and Vietnam.

## The Indian Scene

If we look at the present-day Indian scene, the situation is rather peculiar. Traditional middle class women's organisations neither had feminist nor socialist implications but were rather concerned with a bit of "uplift" without admitting the oppression of women. They were rather concerned with their "backwardness". Nor did they question the traditional role of Indian women in the family or analyse the oppressive implications of the pedestal on which "Indian womenhood" was supposed to be enthroned. The whole middle class ideology is against "women's lib" — which was frequently equated with bra-burning and similar extravagances. The rift within the middle class in general was only over whether women were cast in the homely role of housewife and mother or whether capitalist values propelled them into the role of mere sex-objects. Christian women's organisations and church women's work remained largely in the realm of the "uplift" mentality, projecting the homely variety of the image.

Among the Communist parties which were set up for the purpose of organising the toiling masses, there was a prevalence of the class-reductionist approach, though at least the CPI-M (Communist Party of India—Marxist) developed a rather broad women's organisation and also some theoretical concern with feminist issues. It was mainly the wives of male cadres which could be reached this way and, apart from a reluctance in their own ranks, a prevalent bias against communism as well as feminism among the general public hindered a broadening of women's organisation from a Marxist perspective.

While the prevalent bias in the media is no doubt against "women's lib", the general climate has changed considerably. Since the International Women's Year it is at least admitted that there is such a thing as the women's question. Things started changing in the latter part of the seventies. Among students, movements like the POW (Progressive Organisation of Women) in Hyderabad were formed, and even though some of these were short-lived, they made some impact all the same. More important, the valiant struggle of tribal women against alcoholism and for equal wages, e.g. in Shahada (Maharashtra), became an inspiration for many women who tried to organise themselves. New publications were born. "Bayaja" in Maharashtra was started after the Pune women's conference of October 1975. This conference comprised tribal women, agricultural labourers, industrial workers and professional middle class women as well as housewives. It drew much support from the Lal Nishan Party (Red Flag Party, an independent Communist Party in Maharashtra). In English and Hindi, the "Feminist Network" from Bombay and "Manushi" from Delhi made their appearance. Both

these publications draw their inspiration from the oppressed sections of society.

If we look at it historically, it seems to be the first time that women's liberation has come into its own in India. The national movement under Gandhi's leadership did draw women into the freedom struggle, but Gandhi was quite blind to the double oppression of poor women. He felt that women were destined to suffer, and this was their strength. He projected that the first president of the Indian Republic ought to be a Harijan girl because no other person was purified so much by suffering. Apart from being very clearly anti-colonial, Gandhi never analysed and confronted power-relationships. He was also unaware that there is a power relationship between men and women and that women have been coerced throughout history.

It is interesting in this context to go back to the socialist theoreticians Engels and Bebel, who said that in marriage the man was in the position of the bourgeois and the woman in the position of the proletariat — and that women were the first slaves in history. It is clear from these insights that it is women's oppression and not the articulation of the women's question which divides the working class. Keeping this in mind, the growing awareness and militancy especially among tribal and dalit women is extremely encouraging since it is no doubt part of a general awakening to the conditions of oppression.

Two factors which make themselves strongly felt at present are the frequency of rape in caste-clashes (as in Marathwada, Bajitpur) and reports on the rape of women in police stations. The victims are normally low caste and low class women, but the lessons to be drawn from these incidents apply to the women's question in general. The more rigid the caste system, the heavier the oppression of women. While the laws of purity and pollution have never prevented men of higher caste from assaulting "untouchable" women, these laws have served to segregate even high-caste women and to treat them as untouchable during menstruation, after confinement, etc. This means that, while there may be class and caste divisions within the women's movement, there is also a common cause for all women to fight against the laws of purity and pollution which account for caste and for women's segregation. The rape of women by the representatives of state power and the general reluctance to prosecute any rape case again go parallel with the attitude of police in cases of caste violence. It shows that the very forces of "protection" have internalised the violence against the low caste and women — which theoretically they are supposed to fight. This is a day-to-day illustration of the violence of the socio-economic and political system in general.

Class oppression is rooted in the private ownership of the

means of production and the exploitation of those who have to sell their labour to those who own. The introduction of private property has implied the introduction of women into property relationships, and that they themselves have become the private property of their fathers and husbands. In this way, not only was their labour appropriated, but also their capacity to bear children. The ownership of the means of production was supplemented by the control over the means of reproduction (i.e. childbearing and household). And to those who did not own anything of their own, to "possess" a wife was a compensation.

Caste oppression is based on discriminative division of labour and on laws of purity and pollution. Women are victimized by both these oppressive mechanisms. Apart from having to put up with general caste discrimination, they, being female, suffer from the sexual division of labour — household chores, childbearing, etc.; and further they are paid a lower pay for equal work. As mentioned above, they are also considered as "impure".

It is important to note that underlying the oppression of women is a general characteristic which is common to all women whatever caste or class they may belong to: they can be sexually violated in a way which they cannot really reciprocate. Sexual violation happens not only outside marriage but also within marriage. If the latter is rarely acknowledged this has to do with the fact that women are dealt with as property: how can one violate one's own property? The constantly impending danger of assault is projected as the reason why women need protection and the "protection" they need is a perfect means of control. Even working class women who would be economically better off without husbands (e.g. plantation workers) often keep these husbands, even when they are wife-batterers and drunkards, because otherwise, being single in life, society will suggest that these women are "available" and behave accordingly.

### **Examples of women's oppression**

The oppression of dalit and tribal women, the majority of whom belong to the rural working class, can be illustrated by a look into the newspapers.

*The Times of India* (November 26, 1978) reported of the day-long terror to which 162 Harijan families were subjected, resulting in the death of a person and the plunder and destruction of hutments by about 400 armed musclemen employed by a local landlord.

Unofficial reports said that nine women were criminally assaulted and 26 subjected to unprintable humiliation. Ten persons, including

three women subjected to mass rape, are still missing.

Some villagers say the missing women have been kidnapped by the miscreants while a few others in the village suspect that either they may have committed suicide by jumping into wells or might have been thrown into them by the culprits.

On police violence, V Meera reports in *Manushi* (January 1979, p. 7f):

In Madhya Pradesh while a minister proudly claimed that 'only 137 cases of rape of Harijan and Adivasi girls were reported in the six months of Janata rule', a former Inspector General of police issued a confidential circular asking his subordinates not to commit any rape while the assembly was in session as it would spoil the image of the police. However, rapes involving the police continued. Dewla, an 18 year old Dalit girl of Raipur, was raped by two head constables at the Arana police station where she had been taken for interrogation (August 11, 1977). The police alleged that her husband was wanted in a theft case.

A case much too trivial to ever reach any newspaper attention is the following:

Shantamma, a poor woman from the weavers caste, lost her husband after having had 3 daughters, two abortions and one still birth. The still birth had been a son. She did not manage to feed and dress herself and the three daughters with what she earned from weaving and decided to go to the city with the three children. Being illiterate and jobless, she earned her living by preparing eatables and selling them on the road. With indomitable energy she managed to give all the three girls higher education. In the various slum quarters in which she lived, she was under constant pressure to "adjust to the community", i.e. to give in to the sexual advances of the men. When the daughters grew up, they were subjected to the same pressure. Since this proved unsuccessful, the rumour was spread that the eldest daughter, who had become a teacher and supported the family, was really a prostitute. Threats were made to kill the girl. When the mother confronted the people spreading the prostitution rumour, she was beaten up by the neighbours. When she tried to file a police case, she discovered the constables were already bribed by the other side and told that her daughter was a prostitute. When she managed to file a complaint all the same, the neighbours threatened to kill her. Living in constant fear of assault, she is searching for another hut. While this case is outstanding for the persistence and courage of the women involved, it shows that women cannot get anywhere without an organised women's movement.

Women working in industries are not in a better position. The majority being illiterate and unskilled, they get the oddest jobs at the lowest pay and, on top of it, are also sexually exploited. A report on beedi-workers in Nipani, North Karnataka, emphasises that the checkers in beedi factories prefer the beedies to be brought from the home by women. In order to make them come (and not send a brother or husband), the checkers reject them as inferior when not personally brought by the women. They also undertake to supply women for the boss. In the tobacco godown where women work for 18 hours in a state of virtual imprisonment, sexual harassment is even worse.

While this is the fate of low-caste working-class women, high-caste middle-class women are not necessarily better off. *The Statesman* (September 6, 1978) reported the case of Ranajana Verma who, 2 months married and pregnant, poured kerosene on her clothes and set herself on fire. In her last letters, written in Hindi, she asked forgiveness of her relations and explained that she could no longer bear the harassment of her businessman-husband's family for not being educated enough and not having brought enough dowry. Similarly, cases of young women being set on fire by their husbands' relatives for not paying a big enough dowry or for lack of subordination make quite common reading.

The fate of educated, working, middle-class women is different. If they are married, they suffer from the "double role" because, despite their employment, their husbands normally feel that household work and childbearing are "womens work". If they are spinsters, they suffer the discrimination to which single women are subjected, and are often considered a burden on their relatives or live a miserable life in hostels.

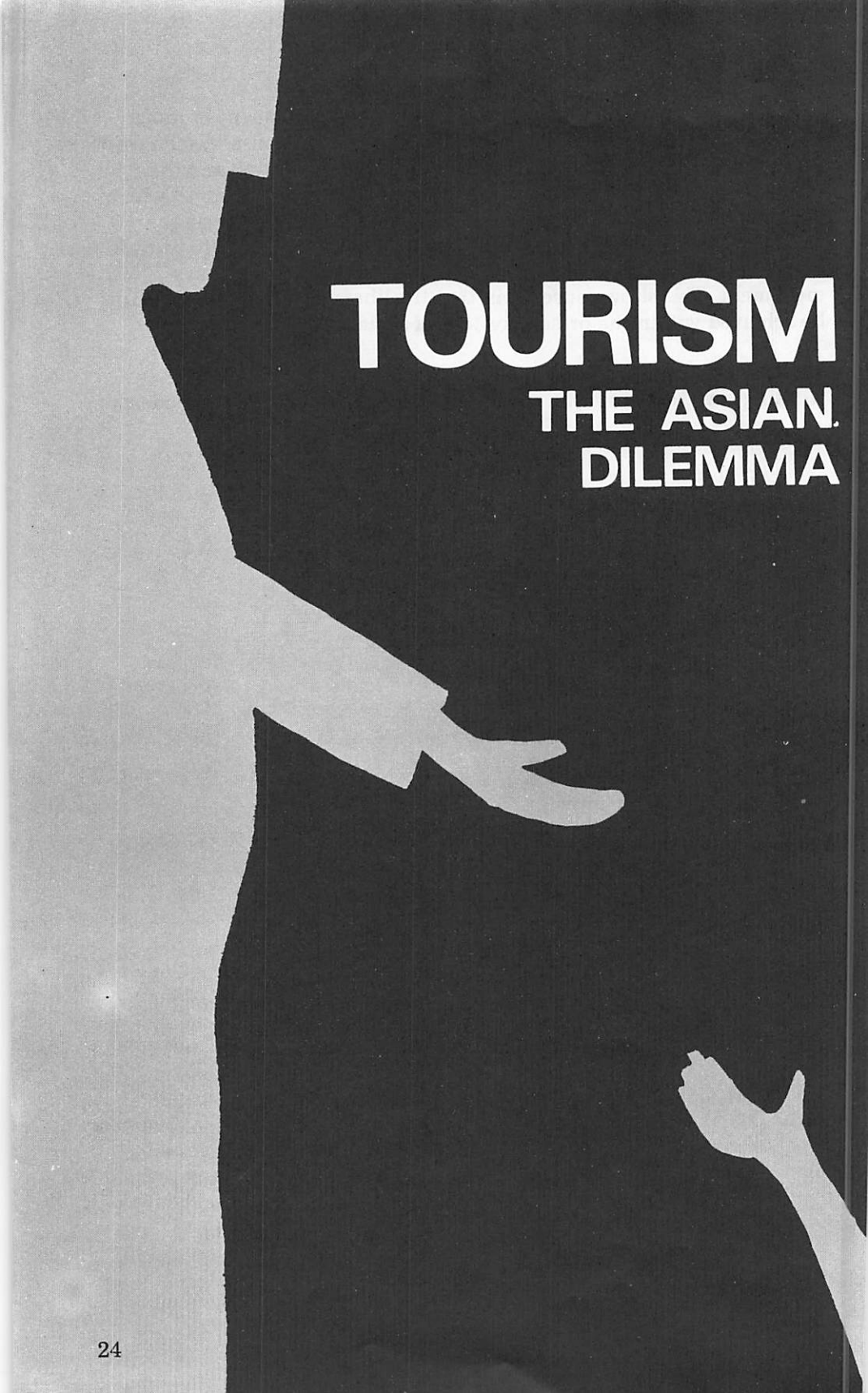
## Conclusion

One basic difference between low class and middle class women seems to be that low class women not only tend to be considered as property within the families, but are also dealt with as property by landlords, goondas, supervisors, etc. Middle class women are only treated as husbands' property, though they have another handicap which is isolation. It is easier for agricultural coolies or industrial workers to get organised than for middle class women in professions or housewives. Low class women, even if they are unemployed, have a chance to get politicised through their husbands' labour struggles. This is unlikely to happen to middle class women. Middle class values keep women more domesticated than low class values. It is therefore understandable that the inspiration of the women's movement in India comes from the working class.

One of the basic difficulties of the women's movement in India consists in the fact that it is extremely difficult to organise women who do not work outside the house. But exploitation in the job and the position of the Indian wife and mother are the double burden to which working women are exposed, and it is equally difficult to organise them. Jobs, decent work conditions, equal pay and facilities to provide substitutes for housework are important targets for the women's movement. This shows once again that the liberation of women cannot be achieved within the present system of society.

As a new society can only be built under the leadership of the working class, the women's movement needs the same kind of leadership.





# TOURISM

THE ASIAN.  
DILEMMA

# Sexual Exploitation in a Third World Setting

*by Mary John Mananzan*

## Introduction

Sexual exploitation has been happening in all countries throughout the ages. There are however distinct nuances to this phenomenon in the setting of the exploited, underdeveloped countries.

This article aims to focus attention on these nuances, taking the Philippine situation as the case in point. It is also meant to be a seminal article which, far from exhausting the topic, aims to provoke further study, further data-gathering and further action. The hypothesis it tries to put forward is that in an underdeveloped, exploited country, women tend to bear the burden of a double exploitation because of their sex. This will be illustrated in the treatment of the following main areas of concern: Tourism and Prostitution, Military Bases and Prostitution, Sexual Exploitation in Business and Work Situations, and Rape and the Imposition of State Control.

For a better understanding of these topics, it is good first to go into the general forms of sexual exploitation of women, and also to give an analysis of Philippine society in order to provide a contextual framework for the areas to be investigated.

## The Forms and Psychology of Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation can range from prostitution through seduction to actual rape. It can therefore use "peaceful means" such as economic lure, persuasive coercion, and emotional blackmail. Even when done with the consent of the women, the fact that the consent is extracted, or even just conditioned, by a weakness or a position of disadvantage, makes the act an act of exploitation. In more exploitative cases violence or threat of violence may be used, as in the example of torture of detained persons or rape in all its forms.

There is a difference in the psychology of the "peaceful" sexual exploitation from the violent forms. The former is based on the recognition that the female possesses something of value to the male which she can be coerced to surrender for a good that appears to her to be, at least for the moment, greater than this value she possesses. It really is not so far removed from the exploitation of factory workers who sell their labour value for economic survival.

The violent forms of sexual exploitation can be traced back to man's structural capacity for forcible entry into women's corresponding structural vulnerability. This physiological factor brings about a psychological awareness in man which renders his ability of forcible entry as a "vehicle of his victorious conquest of her, being the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood."<sup>1</sup>

The factors discussed above, namely the possibility of coercion in the exchange of values or the power of intimidation through superior strength, make sexual exploitation doubly exploitative in situations that are compounded by economic, political, and social coercion and intimidation by the strong of the weak — which is the situation in Third World countries.

### **The Setting: a Third World Society**

As an example of a Third World Society, the Philippine society is typical, even if there are understandable differences caused by unique factors in other Third World societies.

The economic system in the Philippines is characterized by export orientation and foreign control. Because the economic structure is pyramidal in form, where about 2.5% of the 44 million population control the means of production, and because of foreign control of economy, the economic development that is going on succeeds only in widening the gap between the rich and the poor within the country itself and in the impoverishment of the country as a whole. The political system which is under Martial Law is a logical consequence of the economic option. It is characterized by one-man-rule, the rise of the military elite and the suppression of human rights in the name of national security. Mass media are controlled, and the educational system which benefits the few is still western-oriented in its curriculum. Its methodology produces a domesticated rather than a critical citizenry.

It is in this context that the various forms of sexual exploitation of women will have to be discussed.

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1. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 14.

## Prostitution

The most glaring form of sexual exploitation in an under-developed country is prostitution. We shall discuss prostitution in connection with tourism, in relation to the presence of foreign military bases in the country, and in relation to the establishment of foreign firms and industrial concerns in the Philippines.

***Prostitution and Tourism:*** Since the sixties there has been a remarkable leap in the Tourism industry in the Philippines. From being a minor item in the nation's economy, it has today become the fifth largest dollar-earning industry, according to the statistics on Travel and Tourism 1965—1975 published by the Statistics Division, Department of Tourism.

It is true of course that prostitution has been in practice long before Tourism came into prominence. There are nevertheless aspects inherent in tourism that provide a ready climate for the growth of prostitution. Psychologically the tourist is attuned to look for pleasure, to squander money, to be adventurous. The foreign atmosphere lends mystery and variety to the male visitor's urge to satisfy his sexual urges. And the same statistics on travel and tourism we referred to above show that in 1976, 337, 306 or 75.12% of the tourists in the Philippines came either for pleasure or to spend holidays, and of these 70.15% were male. Bars, sauna baths and nightclubs have sprouted all over in Manila and there is a corresponding increase in the number of hospitality girls, club waitresses, sauna bath attendants, hostesses and prostitutes. Women are usually included in a package deal in tourist arrangements and the fee is so divided that the girl gets only 15 to 20 per cent of the fee paid by the clients.

Apart from the economic exploitation there is of course the moral degradation that prostitution brings with it. Thousands of girls from the provinces are herded into Manila and other urban centers for the trade. There is considerable incidence of venereal diseases, especially in the vicinity of the night spots. Malpractices to the advantages of the exploiters are still common in spite of the efforts of the Bureau of Women and Minors.

A country that considers tourism as a pillar of its economic development does so at the expense of human dignity and especially at the cost of the exploitation of its women.

***Prostitution and Military Bases:*** Related to but not identical with tourism is the presence of foreign, mainly American, troops who spend their rest and recreation days in the Philippines, especially in places where there are military bases. Two of the most notorious of these places are Angeles and Olongapo, both in Luzon.

Usually the focus in debates on American bases in the Philippines relates to their impact in military and political terms. They are indeed an affront to Philippine sovereignty, and provide for possible US military intervention in the country; they make the Philippines a target for nuclear attack and constitute a force backing up American economic imperialism in the country.

However, there is an aspect of the bases which is seldom discussed. It is the social cost of the bases in terms of corrupted and dehumanized lives, especially the lives of Filipino women. A thesis has been written by the sociologist-educator Leopoldo Moselina which shows how the bases in Olongapo have created a degraded world of pimps, prostitutes, drug addicts and criminals. Olongapo, a town of nearly 200,000 people, the home of the Subic Bay Naval Base is also the working ground of 16,000 prostitutes and the home of several thousand illegitimate children of American servicemen.<sup>2</sup> During the Vietnam War, Olongapo had the reputation of being a wide open area for GI recreation. But even today the demand for prostitutes has not diminished. Ten thousand girls are licensed; several thousands ply their trade illegally. Only a visitor who has seen the garish surroundings and the hardened, wasted faces of the girls that are trapped in these dens of vice along the main road, Magsaysay Boulevard, will realize the corruption that continues in an atmosphere of institutionalized permissiveness.

The hostesses are of course victims of extreme exploitation. Newton Allen, quoting Moselina, describes how the girls are compensated:

In the clubs . . . the girls receive no salary or benefit and depend for their living on "ladies drinks" for which they receive a 50 per cent commission on the purchase price of P12 to P22. If a man desires to take a girl out of the bar he pays the bar a fee of between P60 and P210; this amount is retained by the owner, the girl must then negotiate the price for her favors with the customer. After the fine is paid, the girl is given a pass to be out on the street. Without a pass she can be picked up by the police as a street-walker and sent to jail. The owners and the police cooperate to keep the system confined to the clubs.<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the obvious economic and sexual exploitation, there are other untoward incidents that may happen during the transactions between customer and entertainer. Incidents of violence and even of deaths have been reported. Entertainers have been killed for refusing to

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2. Newton Allen, "Where Do You Go When the Ship Sails Home?" in *Philippine Liberation Council*, Vol. II, No. 17, (July 14, 1978), p. 4.

3. *Ibid*, p. 5.

do sexually perverted acts with customers. Customers often inflict physical torture on the girls.

A side effect of prostitution which is seldom discussed is the fact that the prostitutes become exploiters themselves. Customers become victims of theft and robbery. This might be regarded by some as an advantage to the prostitute but actually this is a further degradation of her personality. Leopoldo Moselina evaluates this phenomenon thus:

Both customers and entertainer exploit one another. She (the entertainer) prostitutes herself and exploits him (the customer) for money. He uses her as an instrument for sexual gratification in the manner he desires. He handles her as if she is just a leisure accessory, a plaything. In the process, he also prostitutes himself. Even if the relationship does not lead to those crimes mentioned, both parties in this kind of relationship end up being dehumanized. Both are caught up in an organized system of exploitation, injustice, and violence for an economic end and for which the economic and political elites are responsible.<sup>4</sup>

*Prostitution and the Opening of Foreign Firms:* There is still another factor in the rise of prostitution in the country, aside from tourism and the presence of military bases. The incentives to foreign investment have resulted in the mushrooming of industrial establishments all over the Philippines. Aside from the ecological pollution they bring with them, these establishments have given rise to moral pollution wherever they are set up.

A case in point is a foreign sintering company which is forbidden in its own mother country because of the danger to health caused by its pollution. In a locality in the South in which it now stands the effects of ecological pollution are not yet felt by the people. What is acutely felt, however, is the exploitation of young girls who for a monthly wage of P300 become the maids, laundry women, cooks and mistresses of the foreign workers in the place. An interview with the directress of a girl's school in the place reveals the concern she has regarding the moral degradation brought about through the establishment of the firm.

Even today in an industrial setting there are hundreds of cases of women workers sexually exploited by their supervisors and managers, lured by promises of better pay, promotion and better working conditions. The tragic thing is that very few formal complaints are made in these cases because of their fear of being fired and because of the inherent shame attached to violations of this type. A rare instance of a

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4. Leopoldo Moselina, Olongapo's R & R Industry: A Sociological Analysis of Institutionalized Prostitution, an unpublished Master's Thesis, 1978, pp. 105-106.

case filed against the management of a textile industry in Manila, obtained from the files of the Bureau of Women and Minors and the Bureau of Labor, shows, however, that such cases are happening and with greater frequency than reported. A part of an affidavit signed by two girls reads:

Now I want to resign because I feel a deep shame in what happened. I cannot look at people in the face because I feel they despise me. My soul cries out, that is why I wrote this letter to ask help and to ask for justice so that the shameful act perpetrated by management against our womanhood will cease.<sup>5</sup>

And similarly:

I cannot face people because of shame when I think of the humiliation I and my co-workers suffer. Bound to a humiliating position because of the fear of management and because of our abject position of dependence on our wages, we cannot avoid their fooling us. Our great respect for them is abused and they do not think of the harm they do to our morals as women . . . <sup>6</sup>

***Sexual Exploitation and the Imposition of State Control:*** In her book "Against Our Will", Susan Brownmiller discusses the inevitable incidence of rapes that accompanies war, especially when an army conquers the enemy's territory. She writes, tongue in cheek: "When men are men, slugging it out among themselves, conquering new lands, subjugating new people, driving on toward victory, unquestionably there shall be some raping."<sup>7</sup> In a more serious vein she goes into the psychological and sociological factors that make rape an accessory of war. War, she says, "provides men with the perfect psychological backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women."<sup>8</sup> The very maleness of the military confirms for men that women are really peripheral, passive spectators to the action in the centre ring. In the name of victory and the power of the gun, war provides man with a tacit license to rape. Of course the rule is that the winning side is the side that does the raping because rape is the act of a conqueror. It belongs to the intoxication of triumph and it puts a final seal on the humiliation and demoralization of the defeated nation. It is the ultimate insult.

In some way similar to this phenomenon is the sexual exploitation of women in the imposition of state control when it is threatened by dissent or actual subversion. In the suppression of subversion, torture is

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5. Translated affidavit of A. V., 65-1147, Weaving No. 3.

6. Translated affidavit of E.M., 55-4413, Weaving No. 3.

7. Brownmiller, op. cit., p. 31.

8. Loc. cit.

a standard procedure for extracting information. For women, torture is not just physical violence but takes on inevitably a sexual tone. This is evident in the affidavits of women political detainees. For example,

On October 13, Cpl. C.I. and a civilian named R. took me to the bartolina where Col. R and S.P. subjected me to sexual indignities, touching my private parts, while uttering obscenities. On October 14, I was raped by Capt. E.S., as his method of extracting information. Because I had no information to give I was abused sexually from 12.00 noon to past 3.00 p.m.<sup>9</sup>

Similar incidents are attested too by Vilma R., Melvin M.C., Ma. Elena A., Christina V., and Flora V.G. As a result of these maltreatments some who were pregnant lost their babies, as in the case of Perla S.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

The foregoing examples of the sexual exploitation of women in various situations exemplify the dehumanization of the economically and politically dominated. In the struggle for liberation that is going on in all Third World countries, the liberation of women from any form of objectification is a necessary facet. There can be no true liberation without it.

This article is far from being an exhaustive expose of the sexual exploitation and maltreatment of women in the context of a Third World country — as already stated in the introduction.

Its purpose is to invite further research into and investigation of the areas briefly touched on in the preceding pages. Documentation is sadly lacking because of the reluctance of victims to talk about their experiences. Efforts must be made to secure such documentation. A relentless drive must be made to expose the abuses that flourish in the darkness of fear and shame.

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9. *Case of Adora F. de V. from AMRSP – Political Detainees of the Philippines, Vol. I, p. 31.*

10. *AMRSP, Political Detainees of the Philippines Vol. I pp. 36, 37, 39; Vol. II pp. 19, 20, Vol. III – no page, still unpublished.*



# 'Single Bliss'

*by Phyllis Guthardt*

## **The Status of Single Women**

Many societies, both in East and West, have one view in common — a low view of the single woman. She is by definition, in their eyes, undesirable; otherwise why is she not married? She is an embarrassment to her family, for clearly no-one has wished to marry her. She is also easily the victim of discrimination in terms of employment, wages and social status. Historically one can trace reasons for such attitudes developing. An unmarried woman had to remain within the protection and security of her family in order to survive. She was mostly uneducated and not expected to leave the home to go out to work. If she was therefore childless she was unproductive and in some way not fulfilling her ordained role as a woman to bear children and bring them up for the good of the family unit. Naturally she was not expected to know anything about important matters such as love, sex and marriage. She was therefore seen as an ignorant person — often viewed with contempt by her married sisters and brothers. Such attitudes have had profound effects on centuries of unmarried women and their consequent lack of self-esteem is not surprising. It was taken for granted that they could never be whole persons.

Religion has frequently been a factor influencing these attitudes, and the Christian religion does not necessarily have a better record than others in this field.

Through certain misunderstandings of the creation stories in Genesis, woman was believed to be intended as subordinate to man. She was useful when she reproduced, but was even then seen as the passive receptacle of the living seed donated by the man. If she produced male children she fulfilled her purpose. But various proverbs emphasise her unimportance. E.g. 'Better to give birth to a stone than a girl: it is more use.'

The cultures and customs of many societies have strengthened this influence, and frequently the myths and legends of the past have reinforced tradition likewise.

When these powerful forces of culture, religion and tradition are combined with economic factors, a situation is created in which most women are powerless and exploited, but single women may be even more so, whether they are unmarried, widowed or divorced.

It is a basic right of every child to receive an education, yet in Asian countries something like 37% of males and 56% of females are illiterate. Without education the only obvious ways for women to earn a living are domestic service and prostitution. Many single women are therefore forced into a position where they are little more than bodies to be used for work or pleasure.

Young girls without a sufficient income are easy victims for rape as well as prostitution. Yet it is hard for them to find justice if they are the victims of rape or forced to prostitution. Their families sometimes prefer to keep it secret so that the marriageability of the girl is not impaired; also it is hard in a male-dominated society for a woman to be heard or to prove her case.

As far as employment is concerned, for those girls who manage to achieve an education and wish to follow a career, even this is difficult. If they have professional qualifications they must often struggle to obtain equal opportunity for appointment to a post and promotion in it. Some firms refuse to renew a woman's appointment if she wishes to marry or have a child. Women are usually paid poorer wages than men, and sometimes encouraged to retire very early so that no benefits must be paid. In various countries, even where trade unions exist, women are discouraged from joining unions or initiating them.

A group of Asian Christian women meeting in consultation in Hong Kong, in August 1978, reflected on this issue among others. They affirmed that in many societies single women have no status, freedom of movement or choice of action, to the extent that they may be psychologically or even physically threatened. Both church and family have expectations of them which restrict their possibilities. On the other hand, women will often not be able to achieve success in their careers unless they remain single and the church frequently reinforces this in its appointments.

### **Their Status in the Church**

The Christian church throughout its history has always provided for women to serve, both full-time and voluntarily in its work. The Religious

Orders for women in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have given splendid service to the church and the world through the centuries. Nevertheless such women have always had to accept subordinate roles and rarely have been part of the decision-making process or been permitted to exercise a major shaping influence. Any woman who wished to serve the church full-time was required to be single and by definition celibate. While the same mostly held true for male religious and priests in the Roman Catholic Church and in some positions of the Orthodox Churches, it was not so in the Anglican and Protestant Churches. On the contrary, in most cases in these churches it was assumed that male priests would be married.

This expectation of singleness and therefore celibacy for women was carried over into other areas of the church's work. Thus women teachers in mission schools, especially principals, seemed generally to be single, or widowed, and expected to remain so. Women ordained to the ministry today often find pressure obliquely exerted on them, because of the 'difficulties' it is assumed would be involved by marriage and child-bearing. Women missionary teachers, nurses and workers in Christian institutions have frequently 'understood' that if they married their position might rapidly change. The church, which has placed so much stress on marriage and the family, has in fact with the next breath made it impossible for some of its most devoted women servants to enter such a relationship. It has also incidentally been very slow in most places to provide medical and child care facilities, maternity leave, etc., and thus has forced its workers into a choice between continuing to serve or marrying.

There will probably always be some women and some men who feel their vocation to serve Christ and his church involves for them singleness and celibacy. But this should not be mandatory. It should be a vocation rather than an obligation.

And such a vocation should proceed from a basic assumption concerning the woman or the man as a person, preferably a whole person. A state of wholeness as a person does not depend on marriage as such, but may be achieved by anyone growing in love and maturity. The Christian church should affirm such a state.

## Affirmations

It could affirm, for example, with the Hong Kong consultation already mentioned, that,

- \* A single woman is a person in her own right. She is 'made in the image of God'. She has unique gifts and potential to be fulfilled and her own needs to be met.
- \* A single woman may or may not live in community with her family, but she is not to be defined by her relationship to them.

Any woman may become a whole person with or without marriage, and the church and society should be encouraged to appreciate this.

- \* A single woman, as any other woman, is entitled to equal opportunities of education and employment, a living wage and the right to develop her own way of life and her own friendships. This includes the right to adopt a different life-style which may be new to the society.
- \* A single woman should be assured of social support. Possibilities for such support, other than that traditionally provided by the family, should be explored.
- \* A single woman's contribution to life may then be made from her own understanding and experience. Thus both her church and her society will be enriched in a new way.

### Special Problems and Needs

Where customs such as the Dowry or Purdah exist they tend to put considerable pressure not only on the women but also on the families. It is hard for a woman to achieve any freedom in her own right where such expectations from society influence her thinking from childhood on. With regard to the support of a single woman in terms of her emotional needs as well as financial ones, many such women in other societies today are finding new networks of relationships satisfying. In so many situations past patterns are changing. Women need to feel free to choose either to marry or not to marry. Or they may wish to move into some form of flatting or communal living that provides them with friendship and satisfying human companionship.

Likewise there are more divorces than in the past, and women who are separated or widowed also need to be able to develop a network of relationships that will give them support in a way not possible for their families to offer. Both these women and those who have never married have personal and sexual needs the church and society have been unwilling to recognise. It may well be in the future that different approaches will be required to understand and assist them to find rich and full lives.

The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of baptised women, men and children of every race and nation who acknowledge him as Lord. It has sometimes been faithful to the great insight of the Scriptures that all are made in the image of God, that is for a loving, trustful relationship with him and a responsible, sharing partnership with each other. But the church has sometimes lost its insight and treated many of its members as second-class citizens. Women in general know this to be true of them and single women in particular often feel even more discriminated against. Single people have frequently felt left out and

ignored by the heavy emphasis on marriage and family to the exclusion of them as people valuable in their own right.

### Specific questions

The churches are therefore asked to reflect on how they regard single people within and outside their congregations:

- \* Are single people seen as equally important with needs to be met?
- \* Are there particular needs they can be helped in, e.g.
  - housing and the double load where only one person must do all the work
  - employment and the necessity to earn a living where frequently there is discrimination and even victimisation
  - personal support networks
  - security against illness and age
  - solo parents with the responsibility of bringing up children
  - separated or widowed people learning to live single again
  - education of church and society to appreciate their value, their gifts and their needs.
- \* Are single women being encouraged to make a free choice concerning marriage and the future according to their own preferences and conscience?
- \* Are there points where the church is treating its own employees in a discriminatory way and what must be done about it?

“Where singleness is bliss, ’tis folly to be wed” goes an old saying. Bliss or not, singleness is the lot or may be the choice of many more women in the future. Both church and society have a responsibility to support them in it.

# The Oppression of Women by Women

*by Fumiko Yamaga*

## The Fact of Discrimination

In my understanding, the basic source of discrimination against women lies within the women themselves, more than in the existing socio-economic structures.

Although the legal equality of woman is guaranteed on paper, at least in Japan, and the liberation movement has been internationally promoted, the view that reduces women to second-class citizenship in society is deeply ingrained among people because of their historical and cultural backgrounds and by the misinterpretation of our religious traditions in Asian countries.

Throughout a long period of history women were taught to believe in their inferior position in society and to think of themselves as being less able than men. As the inevitable result, women themselves believed that their purpose in life was to subserviently serve men and the family.

Even in the church, where the liberation of individuals is an accepted goal, the position of women as human beings is compromised, by projecting for them a separate set of feminine virtues (c.f. I Timothy 2:9-12). This has been accepted without questioning, following the order in the creation story as set forth in the Bible.

Our acceptance of Paul's position was in turn based on the traditional Jewish view of the sexes. We never bothered to challenge its validity.

This view of the position of woman did not contradict the feudalistic system in Asia and within it the status of women.

## **Women's Role in Discrimination**

The obstacles in the way of the liberation of women are not only created by man and by socio-economic and religious factors; they are due in large measure to the psychological make-up of women themselves. In family situations, in small and large circles of the community, and even in churches, I have noticed that some women try to pull down others who are more emancipated than they are from the old feudal traditions and are becoming self-actualizing persons.

Many examples of this may be seen in the relationships between young, awakened women with their in-laws, between well-educated ministers' wives and senior members of women's groups in the church, and in women's educational institutions. I believe this compulsion to undermine others' progress is caused by the jealousy of the woman who lacks the courage and the will to challenge the reality, although she herself has the desire to pursue the same goal.

### **Martha and Mary**

It is interesting to interpret the story of Martha and Mary in the New Testament in this light. Although Martha takes upon herself the role of the service of men, she appears to be jealous of Mary who has chosen a way of life that does not follow the traditional pattern. Martha tells Jesus that Mary does not take the expected women's role in the traditional sense. But her frustration seems to spring really from her psychological jealousy of Mary.

### **The Task ahead**

The obstacles to women's liberation are sometimes unformed and unconscious. In order to avoid this type of jealousy of others, it is necessary to show sufficient courage and discover our own selves. When we challenge man-centered society, the first thing to do is to overcome our own narrowness and the inner conflicts among women. And this is a task not only for women but for society in general.

We must begin by realising our role and position where we are. We must not just passively accept the present situation, but must start asking questions related to women's status, discriminations in society and the true meaning of the liberation struggle in Asia. We must formulate a clear goal for our efforts which can functionally direct all people in their present situations, guided by the understanding that "it is more important for a hundred persons to take one step forward than it is for one person to take a hundred steps."

# Appendix

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## CONSULTATION FOR WOMEN

*Sponsored by CCA's Commission On Theological Concerns*

*Hong Kong, August 15–18, 1978*

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In the Asian situation the majority of people are exploited, and therefore dehumanised. They have to fight not just for social justice and human dignity but even for their very existence.

Within this struggle for survival women find themselves doubly exploited because of their sex. Traditions and myths, institutions such as the law, education and even the church, have frequently increased their oppression. Among the powerless they have held least power.

The last C.C.A. assembly registered its concern about this situation and requested the Commission on Theological Concerns to consider the role of women in church and society. It saw an urgent need for a reappraisal of this role.

The aim of the Theological Commission is 'to promote ways of doing theology which begin with Asian life situations and analyse them so that the issues for theology emerge from Asian realities themselves.' The question of the position of women was taken up within the larger context of human dignity, emphasising the struggles of Asian women for full humanity as a priority in discussion and support.

With this in mind, a few women involved in these struggles in various Asian situations were called together to reflect on their own and others' experience. Ten women with training in theological and sociological areas were invited to the consultation. The task given them was twofold:

- To look at the issues which fall under the category of the struggles for human dignity in Asia with special attention to women.
- To suggest a programme for the C.C.A. in (a) study, research and theological reflection, (b) leadership training, (c) local and regional initiatives.



## Participants:

1. Dr Gabrielle Dietrich, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Madurai, 625010, *South India*.
2. Ms. Chitra Fernando, 368/3 Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7, *Sri Lanka*.
3. Rev Dr Phyllis Guthardt, Knox Church, Bealey Ave., Christchurch *New Zealand*.
4. Ms. Henriette Karoppo, Tengku Cik di Tiro, 20, Jakarta, *Indonesia*.
5. Ms. Lee Hong Chong, Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, 57 Peking Road, 4th Floor, Kowloon, *Hong Kong*.
6. Sister Mary John Mananzan, St Scholastica's College, P.O. Box 3153, Manila, *Philippines*.
7. Ms. Ruth Manorama, No. 2 Marappa Garden, Nandi Burg Rd, Bangalore, *India*.
8. Rev. Ms. Dorothy Wacker, G.P.O. Box 116, Adelaide, 5001, *South Australia*.
9. Rev. Mrs. Fumiko Yamaga, 3-15-13 Shinkamada, Ota-ku, Tokyo 144, *Japan*.

The tenth woman invited was unable to come:

Dr Sang Chang, 205, 5 Dong-Kangnan Mansion Apt., Dang San Dong, Yeong Teung Po-ku, Seoul, *Korea*.

Ms. Wong Po Yiu visited the consultation on one occasion as a representative of the Asian Church Women's Conference; Dr Preman Niles, Secretary for Theological Concerns, C.C.A., attended the first session; and Rev. Ron O'Grady, C.C.A., was present for the sessions on the last afternoon and evening. Dr Guthardt, a member of the Commission on Theological Concerns, acted as co-ordinator for the group.

## Method of working

In order to achieve the aim of 'living theology' the group worked as a round table. Each person told something of her own history and experience and acted as moderator for a session. She presented the issues of her own situation and her concerns in it and these were gathered into ten major areas. Continued formulation and refining of the issues provided the material for theological reflection and suggestions for action. Dorothy Wacker and Chitra Fernando acted as recorders and prepared the preliminary report which summarised major concerns under the following headings:

1. Women's struggles in the context of the total struggle.
2. Woman's image of herself.
3. The Church and the oppression of women.
4. Women and the institutions of marriage and family.

5. Women and childbearing.
6. The single woman.
7. Prostitution, violence and other forms of sexual exploitation.
8. The oppression of women by other women.
9. The oppression of women according to class background.
10. Theological reflections concerning human dignity and women.

All participants were deeply appreciative of the opportunity given by the Christian Conference of Asia for this consultation to take place. The openness of the discussions and the serious commitment of all present to the struggle for human dignity were signs of great promise.

Henriette Katoppo

Phyllis Guthardt

*Joint moderators*

# **1. Women's struggle in the context of the total struggle.**

In Asian countries most people are exploited and therefore dehumanised. Social justice and human dignity are a battleground. Men and women have to fight not only for such rights but even more, for their own existence. When the indicators of oppression are applied to women it is clear that they are doubly exploited because of their sex. They have less access to education, property, health care and security. Frequently they are denied any influence in society and in making decisions affecting the welfare of the community. They lack political representation in their country and in church life. Together with this denial of human rights goes widespread physical exploitation.

One of the acute difficulties in achieving change is that much oppression of women can be denied because of the double standards applied to men and women. So a sexual division of labour and responsibility is based on supposed 'natural' differences. A kind of 'apartheid' is applied. The situation may however be even more complex than in racism because of the emotional dimension in the relationship between men and women.

Another important factor in the oppression of women is that it deforms and distorts both victims and aggressors in a more direct, immediate and personal way than in some other forms of oppression. New insights from modern anthropology and social psychology show that there is a broad spectrum of human sexuality, and in every person both male and female elements are present. If this is ignored a one-sided development of personality and character results. The so-called 'natural' differences have little if any real base and should not influence our understanding of the roles of men and women.

In the family situation a woman may be the breadwinner but also the one who cares for the family. She must then bear the burden of the economic crisis in the spheres both of production and reproduction.

Only where standardised patterns of subordination are abolished does it become possible to develop a full human personality in which qualities traditionally seen as “masculine” and “feminine” are integrated. We believe in a mutual and equal society which is not based on the profit motive and the survival of the fittest. This means that the women’s struggle is really seen for what it is only within the wider struggle for a just society.

## 2. Woman’s image of herself.

We have maintained that sex roles are the result of conditioning. Many factors influence them. Cultural and historical traditions have a great bearing on the way men and women see their roles in a society. So have religious teachings. Economic and political factors are also powerful in determining them.

A woman’s image of herself is closely related to the roles accepted because of such conditioning. Of course she retains certain distinctive characteristics and these have both positive and negative effects. For instance, biologically she is the one able to conceive and bear a child but her biology ought not finally to determine her role in life.

In the Christian milieu women frequently feel caught between the unacceptable image of Eve, the temptress, and the impossible model of Mary, the virgin mother. So far the Church has done little to explore alternatives.

Are there values to be explored in the so-called ‘feminine’ aspects of divinity in Scripture? Compare, for example, the pictures of God in Isaiah 66:12-14, Isaiah 49:14-18, Hosea 11:1-4, Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34. Scripture has often been used to support polarisation between male and female without considering the linguistic and cultural factors behind the records. A kind of hierarchy has been proclaimed, in which God, seen as male, reigned, then men who owed obedience to him. The feudal system was maintained by men’s lordship over the serfs — women and the animal creation, through a misunderstanding of the ancient Genesis stories. Abuse of women, animals and the earth itself has often resulted, and the ideal of the new creation as charted in Galatians 3:27-28 has been lost in many places.

This has tended to cause an overstatement of the male element and an understatement of the female in Biblical exposition, whereas the polarity in Scripture is one of sin and righteousness — a matter of theology not biology. We are well aware of the caution needed in using

any human terms to describe God and would not wish to substitute female for male descriptions. Surely God is above and beyond our understandings of gender. Nevertheless, as we must use human analogy, let the whole range of human experience be used.

### **3. The Church and the oppression of women.**

The Church's answer to the raising of women's issues seems to be 'thus far and no further'. How far is the Church ready to go — even as far as anticipating a woman Pope?

It is well recognised that at times the Church has influenced directions in society. Perhaps even more often society has brought pressure on the Church to move forward. Concerning the situation of women, it often appears that the Church's 'concessions' have been a mere half-hearted response to the changes in society.

Is the Church's theology of what it means to be human a challenge to society? Or is it at least a positive response to changes in society?

To many the Church seems to be playing the first century game, accepting certain New Testament interpretations as the last word on women's issues. However, is it playing the game in all fields, consistently and honestly? For example, it has discarded N.T. teachings regarding the obedience due to masters from slaves. It rarely practises the communal ownership of property. Why does it wish to perpetuate dehumanising attitudes concerning women? The question must be asked whether there is any value in throwing Biblical texts at parties holding other views or whether Christians are not committed to attempt to understand them according to sound principles of hermeneutics. The Church's vision is the Kingdom of God. The new covenant includes every man, woman and child of every race and nation who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. If the Kingdom invites the full participation of all its members, this means that the equal involvement of women and men in building the new society is not merely important but vital.

### **4. Women and the institutions of marriage and family.**

The family is the primary unit of economic survival and social support. Economic constraints therefore have a strong impact on emotional values attaching to the family. There are things to be said for and against various styles of family life — the nuclear family and joint or extended families. These positive and negative aspects require exploration.

Historically the structures of the family, including male and female roles within it, is closely related to the development of private property and also to changes in the mode of production. This relationship too

requires exploration, bearing in mind customs such as the payment of dowry and bride-price. It is noted, for instance, that where the mode of production has changed significantly towards a more even distribution of resources, the situation of women has markedly improved.

Almost everywhere the dominant picture of Family in the Church is one permeated by middle-class attitudes and values. These values are rarely questioned. For instance, should not insights from history and the Biblical message be used as a basis for examining them? How can this be achieved?

In most Asian families the role assigned to the woman is one of subservience to men. Even if a woman holds considerable responsibility in her profession and status in society, at home she is expected to be quiet and obedient. This causes deep frustration in many able women who wish to share a responsible partnership with men at home as well as in the wider world.

We consider also that new and more varied options should be available both to married and single people in the life-style they choose. At present society and the Church tend to present and approve inflexible and narrow patterns. But society is changing rapidly in most places and pluralistic approaches are more and more demanded. Different patterns of living together are required, which do justice to the personal and community needs of individuals within a society. Not only do political necessities force this upon us, but the New Testament itself suggests other forms of living together which may result in the enrichment of both men and women. Serious consideration must be given by the Church to this matter so that it may minister lovingly to all those touched by such changes in life around them.

## **5. Women and childbearing.**

Childbearing, a function essential to the continuity of humankind, is entrusted to women. It is both a joy and a burden. However, it is not sufficiently realised that childbearing is a social need and a gift to society. So women frequently feel discriminated against instead of being fully supported in fulfilling this social function.

If society has been slow to appreciate this role, nor has the Church been helpful. The Church should not lag behind in making sure that certain benefits are available for women, such as maternity leave and child care. It should ensure that these benefits are provided for those in its employment. It should also acknowledge medical advances in regulating procreation for the ultimate welfare of both mother and child, thus also for the family as a whole. Child-bearing as such has tended to be made into an ideology that defines the role of women and their contribution to society in an exhaustive way instead of as one of

the functions and roles available to women. It is a basic right of every woman finally to decide if and when she will have a child. The Church and society ought to be able to affirm that right and support the woman in it.

Frequently there is a contradiction between childbearing and the other roles of a woman. Where this occurs she needs encouragement to realise all her potential and develop all her capacities as fully as possible. The tensions must somehow be reconciled and this cannot be achieved without understanding and goodwill.

## **6. The single woman.**

In many societies single women have no status, no freedom of movement or choice of action. To such an extent is this true that they may be psychologically or even physically threatened. Both Church and family have expectations of them which restrict their possibilities and actively maintain them in inferior status. Together with this it is frequently the case that they are not able to achieve success in their careers unless they remain single. The Church has frequently reinforced this point of view in its appointments, consciously or unconsciously requiring celibacy of women where it has normally preferred men to be married.

However it is our conviction that single woman is a person in her own right with unique gifts and potential to be fulfilled and her own needs to be met.

It may so happen that the single woman lives in community with her family, or it may not. She is not to be defined by her relationship to her parents or other members of the family. Any woman may become a whole person with or without marriage. The mere fact of marriage does not achieve this state of being a whole person, for a man or a woman. Nor does being single preclude it. The Church should be leading society in recognising this fact.

A single woman, as any other woman, is entitled to equal opportunities of education and employment. She has a right to a living wage and to develop her own way of life. She should be encouraged to form her own friendships and to find a satisfactory life-style for herself which may be different from that recognised within her own society.

In order to do this single women should be assured of social support. This means that new methods will need to be explored. The family has traditionally filled this support role, though not always greatly to the satisfaction of the women themselves. Now, however, changes in the structure of the family and of society itself, together

with new expectations of many women, mean that old patterns may not always serve, but more fluid ones are necessary.

If the single woman can be recognised in such a way, as a person in her own right with her own network of relationships, she may then make her contribution to society from her own understanding and experience. Thus both society and the Church will be enriched in a new way.

## **7. Prostitution, violence and other forms of sexual exploitation.**

Prostitution is always an abuse of God's gift of human sexuality. It holds little offer of the mutual companionship, help and comfort that loving sexual expression can provide, or any security and freedom for the woman. It is almost invariably exploitative by character, and it dehumanises both man and woman.

In third world countries, prostitution assumes a doubly exploitative character. Especially is this true where there are foreign military bases and where tourism has become an integral part of the country's economic programme.

It seems clear also that under highly dictatorial governments where police have wide powers, there is a high incidence of rape and sexual violence. We consider that a study should be made of the relationship between rape, violence and the imposition of state powers.

Undoubtedly the problem of prostitution has many facets. It cannot be solved by mere legislation or by moralising. As the Church works to change the situation of prostitutes, Christians' attitude to them must be that of love and acceptance rather than of judgement and self-righteousness. Much prostitution comes out of sheer poverty and the inability to find work for the support of the people involved or their families. Therefore programmes for the rehabilitation of prostitutes are bound to fail if they do not offer viable alternative occupations. We know of few churches that are making any real efforts in this area of concern.

## **8. The oppression of women by other women.**

It sometimes sounds as if women think their oppressors are generally male. This is not of course so. While many women do experience male domination in a way that can only be described as oppression, it is also a fact that their domination by other women frequently stands in the way of liberation. It may take the form of discrimination, exploitation or devaluation. Different situations reveal such oppression. For example it may be a matter of status, those in higher or more powerful positions in society exploiting those of

lower status or in powerless situations. It may be a matter of ideology, e.g. the conservative oppressing the radical. Frequently expatriates have power over nationals, e.g. in business corporations or even in the church; or the opposite may apply so that migrant women are exploited by employers in their adopted country.

It is frequently observable that middle-class women who employ other women in domestic labour take advantage of their employees in the hours of work and in wages. Again even active Christian women do not always realise how they are using other women.

Non-recognition of such oppression is linked with the acceptance of a hierarchical view of society. Especially is this so where male dominance is taken for granted and often based on misconceptions of Biblical teaching. Research is needed concerning this acceptance, especially by those who claim to follow Jesus of Nazareth.

## **9. The oppression of women according to class background.**

In different countries oppression varies according to class background. We request that case studies should be made concerning this so that the church has living material to work on.

It will be necessary to study working-class women's movements as well as the more familiar middle-class ones in order to learn from their insights. It should then be possible to find out what their actions mean for Church praxis and for theological thinking.

The role of women in the Church, like its picture of the family, tends to be influenced by middle-class values. Therefore the Church has to make a special effort to understand the situation of the oppressed classes. It frequently appears to make little attempt to encourage its members to relate to working women, both inside and outside the church. Yet if it shows no understanding or solidarity with them it is once again ignoring the model of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.

## **10. Theological reflections.**

We affirm the necessity for all members of the Church to engage in action, based on theological reflection and social analysis of the human situation in which they are placed. 'Living theology' or theology built out of experience is basic to fulness in the Church's life.

Christian theology over the centuries has dealt on the whole very inadequately with an understanding of humankind as involving both male and female. In the history of the Church the concept and description of God as 'male' has been over-emphasised and therefore assumed. 'Female' descriptions have been almost totally neglected and therefore today sound rather shocking to most ears.



Following the most primitive creation stories of Genesis the woman has been seen as created very much as an afterthought, second and subordinate to the man. The man has constituted the norm and the woman a deviation from it. 'Maleness' and 'femaleness' have thus been polarised in the human situation. All this has ignored the more lofty Genesis 1 view of creation where both are seen as created in the image of God and given to each other for care and responsibility under God and within the created universe.

Our technology needs to be reappraised in the light of newer understandings of what it means to be human and 'made in the image of God'. We recognise that all persons have 'male and female' elements and characteristics. As we find this a liberating notion in our relationships with one another, so we wish to use the whole range of description in our understanding of God, always aware of the limitations of language in such an enterprise.

Women experience discrimination, oppression and exploitation in many forms because of their sex. But this has rarely become a theological concern for the Church in a way similar to that of racism and slavery. Paul's vision as recorded in Galatians 3:28 links our status in the Church with our baptism:

There is neither Jew nor Greek,  
there is neither slave nor free,  
there is neither male nor female;  
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We believe this noble affirmation needs to be upheld with much greater urgency and with theological conviction and thoroughness. This may be seen within the context of liberation theology or any theology relating to personhood in the family of God and the total human struggle.

The Church centres its belief in Jesus Christ who actually practised his care for the value of persons with as much regard to women as to men. Incidentally he placed no special emphasis, as far as we know, on motherhood and family.

The Church is called to be a *sign* of the Gospel. In the face of all traditions and opposition which hinder the full participation of women in society, the Church is called to demonstrate the good news of Christ.

This will require demonstration both in the way it talks about and values *all* humanness, and in the way it releases the gifts of *all* its people. Too often, instead of pioneering such views in society it lags behind society. Certain New Testament teachings have been interpreted in such a way as to cause confusion and misunderstanding about women, even

discrimination and oppression against them. Our question now is: 'What can be done about this?'

For a beginning, we believe the Church needs to give more help to its members in understanding the situation in Biblical times and its relationship to our situation today. It also needs to develop an informed appreciation of how context and culture affect all theology.

Finally, while recognising the unique significance of the Biblical records, we wish to stress the importance of our contemporary context and our present experience of God. We affirm our belief that the Holy Spirit still continues to lead us into new ways and new truths, appropriate to our time. The truths contained in the Scriptures have been of vast importance in the past and they continue to be important. Nevertheless we believe the authentic insights of our age are leading us not only in the present but towards the future.

### **Recommendations for research, study and action**

The consultation believes various avenues of study and action must be pursued if the issues involved in the women's struggle are to be faced responsibly. It therefore recommends:

#### **A. Research and Study**

1. That research be initiated in
  - (a) The effects of cultural factors such as tradition, custom, language and superstition upon women in various societies.
  - (b) The legal status of women in
    - (i) The civil sphere
    - (ii) The ecclesiastical sphere.
  - (c) The relationship between the imposition of state power and rape and violence towards women.
  - (d) The relationship between tourism and prostitution
  - (e) Theological issues such as:
    - (i) Male/female descriptions of God and the teachings of Scripture in the light of these
    - (ii) The influence of such language on our views of God and the Church
    - (iii) New theological understandings of marriage and family life
    - (iv) Alternative patterns of life-style.
2. That case studies be prepared giving consideration to
  - (a) the conditioning of women — with regard to 1 (a) above and theological factors
  - (b) the oppression of women with reference to class structures
  - (c) the situation of women in domestic labour.
3. That the C.C.A. give urgent further attention to the issue of tourism

and prostitution (cf. a new study from Taiwan, to be soon available in English).

4. That a positive analysis of alternative life-styles with particular reference to Asian situations be undertaken.
5. That the co-operation of the Asian Christian Women's Conference be sought in studying all these areas but particularly that of family life.
6. That a position paper on Women and Childbearing be prepared and circulated, using our awareness of the International Year of the Child as a background.
7. That research and study already undertaken, e.g. nationally, be collated and made widely available.

## **B. Action**

Further directions for action will become clear as a result of research and study undertaken as above. Meantime some immediate possibilities suggested are:

1. The education and organisation of women at all levels
  - (a) through core groups
  - (b) through conscientization (awareness-raising) seminars on local, national and regional levels.
  - (c) through the programmes of existing women's organisations.
2. Seminars for pastors' wives (and pastors?) and for theological students and their wives on the image of women in general and of pastors' wives in particular.
3. The building up of an organisation or network of concerned people enabling the sharing of experiences and new insights and the co-ordination of 'Findings'. A C.C.A. Women's Desk should be provided and A.C.W.C. channels also used.
4. The establishment of documentation centres for women's concerns.
5. A bibliography of all publications dealing with the women's struggle with special reference to the Asian situation.
6. The popularisation of insights of women involved in the struggle for social justice in all possible ways, e.g. a volume containing articles by participants in this consultation and through the above methods.
7. Action by the churches to follow up the research and study recommended, e.g. concerning domestic servants, prostitution, the employment of women workers in the Church, etc. Also in the distribution and study by congregations of papers prepared, for instance, on alternative life patterns, women and child-bearing, theological concerns.
8. Encouragement of groups to study the World Council of Churches' booklet 'The community of women and men in the Church'.
9. A working group, such for example as that involved in this consultation, to continue to assist the C.C.A. in its programme for women's work.